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THE TREND OF SISTER ARTS.

It has been remarked as one of the features of the recent exhibition of pictures at the Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia that it contained no example of the picture that tells a story. The observation is just, but belated. It is a good while since the picture which might serve as an illustration fell into artistic if not popular disfavor. Perhaps its disappearance is secretly regretted. Perhaps the story picture would still appeal more effectively than any other to the majority and would still find the readiest sale. But it is disdained by the modern artist as too commonplace to deserve his attention and apart from the portraits, which are in a class by themselves, the subjects treated in a contemporary exhibition are such as permit either the expression of a sentiment or the realization of a decorative effect.

Thus the movement is toward a greater degree of abstraction and toward the substitution for the objective motive of the subjective idea. The picture which is not brought into existence for the sake alone of its beauty, will be designed to serve as the vehicle of a personal emotion. Is it not this that constitutes the charm of the very finest work?

There is no feeling in the natural landscape. Yet by some subtle alchemy this insensible scene when painted by a Daubigny or a Rousseau, will stir within us those "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." And it is toward this accomplishment that the pictorial art upon its most important side appears to tend.

It is a curious thing that the sister art of music should seem to be coincidentally moving in the opposite direction, that its course should be from the spiritual to the material, from the creative to the imitative, from the refined to the gross and from the beautiful to the ugly. It used to be that the recognized functions of music were to delight the ear; to gratify the intellect, and to give an utterance to feelings otherwise inexpressible. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, science, beauty and emotion, these were the phases of its development and always its value and character lay in the quality of an essentially spiritualistic, non-material, imaginative appeal.

Now we have changed all that and the man who is acclaimed as the greatest composer of the day gives us a symphony which undertakes to portray the cries of the baby in its bath, a tone poem which reproduces the bleating of the sheep and the whirring of the windmill and an opera whose distinctive merit is proclaimed to be the marvelous realism with which it describes such things as civilized people customarily agree to ignore. That this music had any value or interest or beauty in itself is more than anyone asserted. Its distinction exclusively consisted in the marvelous effectiveness of its realistic imitations.

The story picture is obsolete, but story telling music is the very latest thing; and such stories as they are! But there are signs that a reaction is in progress.

P. I.